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LEAHY: CIA NOMINEE FACES TOUGH SCRUTINY
SOUTH BURLINGTON, VT

The man nominated to replace former CIA Director William Casey will "have to answer some very serious questions," Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said Tuesday.

Leahy, a former member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Acting CIA Director Robert Gates must tell members of Congress "whether the CIA is willing and able to go along with the oversight that the law requires."

The hearings into Gates' nomination opened Tuesday in Washington. Gates told the intelligence panel he did not tell Congress last year about the diversion of profits from Iranian arms sales to Nicaraguan rebels because his knowledge was based on "worrisome but extraordinarily flimsy evidence."

Leahy, who took part in Senate Intelligence Committee hearings into the Iran-contra affair, said he was "troubled by the fact he (Gates) knew things in October and he didn't tell us until November."

Referring to presidential aides, the junior Vermont senator also said, "A lot of people down there (in Washington) are covering their tails saying, 'I didn't know what's going on.' That's baloney."

Leahy said Gates stands to take over a CIA when "the level of trust (Congress has for the organization) is the lowest it's been" in more than a decade.

"Under William Casey, they were willing to substitute a covert policy for a foreign policy," Leahy said. "Often, that was accomplished by withholding information from the intelligence committees in Congress."

On the other hand, Leahy called Gates an "accomplished professional and very knowledgeable."

"I think these hearings (into Gates' nomination) are going to be extremely important," the senator said. "His answers will determine just what kind of relationship there will be between Congress and the White House for the next two years."